

News Release

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Daphne — The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today issued a reminder to be on the lookout for manatees in Alabama waters this time of year. The request comes as a result of a significant number of recent sightings around the area.

“Every summer, we hear reports about manatees in the area,” said Bill Pearson, supervisor for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Field Office in Daphne. “The reports usually start coming in as waters in the area begin warming up, and are scattered around the area, from the Intracoastal Waterway to the upper Delta. This year, we’ve received a large number of reports from residents along tributaries of the Dog River in Mobile County.”

“We are particularly concerned, since many people in this area may not be used to seeing manatees,” said Pearson. “And, human activities can create some of the major threats to a manatee’s survival.”

Manatees are listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act, and are protected by Federal law.

“We’ve known for many years that manatees visit our area, but not much is known about where they come from or how long they stay,” said Dianne Ingram, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist. “We still have a lot to learn about how—and when—manatees use Alabama waters.”

Water temperatures in Alabama are believed to be too cold for manatees to live year-round, since they prefer water warmer than 68 degrees. Summer provides the right mix of warm water and plentiful aquatic vegetation to make area rivers, streams, and other waterways an inviting temporary home to these large aquatic mammals.

Ingram said that scientists can learn more about the habits of manatees in Alabama from people who have lived in the area. Their recollections of past sightings, as well as when and where they occurred, can help biologists develop a more complete knowledge of the species.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists ask for your help in developing more detailed knowledge about manatees in coastal Alabama. Please call the Daphne Field Office at (251) 441-5181 to report manatee sightings or if you have additional information about manatees.

Service biologists also offer the following tips for enjoying manatees, while protecting these rare and endangered creatures:

- Learn to recognize signs that manatees may be present. These include seeing large swirls and bubble trails on the surface of shallow freshwater or brackish streams or inlets.

Manatees-2-2-2-2

- If you do see a manatee, look, but don't touch. If manatees become too familiar with humans, it can alter their behavior and make them lose their natural fear of boats and people.
- During the summer months, be extra careful while boating. In areas where manatees have been observed, slow down to avoid hitting them. Manatees often remain near the surface and can be hit by the boat hull or prop.
- Do not give food or water to manatees.
- When manatees are in the area, maintain your distance--USFWS recommends that you stay at least 50 feet away. While docile and curious, manatees are quite large and swimming too close can be risky.
- And remember, manatees are protected under the Federal Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammals Protection Act. These laws prohibit harassing them in any way.
- Report sightings to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Daphne, at (251) 441-6630 or (251) 441-5839.
- If you see a manatee that is injured or appears to be in trouble, contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 544 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 63 Fish and Wildlife Management offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.